

Lawrence Engel and the Progressive Landscape

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ABSTRACT

LAWRENCE ENGEL AND THE PROGRESSIVE LANDSCAPE

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Lawrence Engel took an estimated ten thousand photographs in Nevada between the 1930s and his death in 1953, which he published as real photo postcards. These images provide a substantial record of physical and cultural developments in the state, during an era marked by the construction of highways and the politics of the New Deal. As with other postcard photographers, Engel's work has been overlooked within histories of photography, particularly pertaining to the history of landscape photography. Bringing his work into this history provides us with an alternative to the standard narrative. Furthermore, we can trace a hitherto unrecognized influence upon later developments in the genre, so much so that to leave a photographer such as Engel out of it is to have an incomplete picture.

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Introduction

Between 1925 and his death in 1953, Lawrence Engel, proprietor of the Nevada Photo Service, took more than 8000 photographs of Nevada's landscape and architecture that he sold as real photo postcards.¹ Engel was typical of dozens of photographers who travelled the American west from the 1920s to the 1950s taking photographs to publish as postcards. He cannot be considered a photographer of singular vision. On the contrary, his work frequently matches the definition of what has been called the 'authorless' photograph, yet because of this he presents us with a case study of how the landscape was viewed and then disseminated through popular culture and collective consciousness to reflect ideas of national identity.

Though he photographed the desert and the main street, his real subject was the highway. Like other postcard photographers, he regarded it as an essential symbol of American progress. This was a point of view at odds with what has become the standard narrative of American landscape photography, where the marks of progress have more commonly been resisted or criticised. To keep Engel and other postcard photographers out of that narrative is to leave it incomplete.

¹ As the name suggests, real photo postcards are photographs printed in the postcard format. They first became popular in the early 1900s and were popular until cheaper printing processes made colour postcards more practical in the early 1950s. I first discovered some of Engel's postcards in a second-hand store in Istanbul. Searching for Nevada postcards online led me to the UNR Special Collections site. A few of my postcards were identical to some images on the site so I was able to compare the handwritten inscriptions on the cards. Engel's handwriting has a couple of quirks that make his postcards immediately distinguishable, notably a kink in the lower bar of the 'E'.

Chapter 1: A Postcard Photographer

Lawrence Engel was born in Menasha, Wisconsin on September 3 1885, 1888 or 1889 and drowned in a boating accident in Nevada on September 18 1953. News reports on his drowning published on page one in both the *Reno Evening Gazette* on September 19 and the *Nevada State Journal* on September 20 1953 give us the most complete biographical information we have on him. According to these articles, he arrived in Reno in the early 1920s, having served in the U.S forces fighting against Pancho Villa during the 1910-20 Mexican Revolution, and opened the Nevada Photo Service in 1925. During the thirty years he lived in Reno he was a member of hunting and fishing clubs, the Reno Chamber of Commerce, the Fraternal Order of Eagles and the Master Printers Association of America. This fits a typical profile of a civic-minded owner of a small business, more at home in middle America than exploring its cultural frontiers. If Ansel Adams gives us a representational image of a landscape photographer working in the 1930s, then Engel is the contradiction.² Any connections we make between Engel and the better known photographers working in the west at the time must be predicated on the understanding that they may have had no awareness of each other's work.

The discrepancy in his birth date arises because both newspapers give 1885 as the year of his birth, but looking through records recovered through

² In her introduction to Adam's work, *The Eloquent Light*, Nancy Newhall describes his work as; "the immense and monumental, the exquisite and lyrical, the luminous and the sombre", implying the landscape photographer required a vision equal to the grandeur of his subject. (Newhall, p 13)

www.familysearch.org, the United States Census of 1900 lists Lawrence Engel of Neenah, Wisconsin as born in 1888 and on his 1917 draft registration card he gives his birth date as September 3, 1889. The actual year of his birth may not be that important; genealogists frequently encounter such inconsistencies, and in this case they do not affect what else we know about him.

In the 1900 Federal census for Neenah, he is recorded as being the only child of Joseph and Josephine Engel. Joseph is recorded as emigrating from Germany in 1859 when he was one year old and marrying American born Josephine Gesiner in 1886. The 1900 Bunn's Business Directory records Joseph as living at 417 1st St, Neenah and working at the Kreuger and Lachmann paper mill (Bunns, 654).

There is one other discrepancy worth noting. An untitled fact sheet on Engel held at the Nevada Historical Society does not mention Pancho Villa but indicates that Engel registered for the US Army draft in 1917. The registration form shows he applied for an exemption on the grounds he was the sole supporter of his family. At the time he was living in Westwood, California, married with one child (Frank, born 1916) and working as a 'box sawyer' for the Red River Lumber Company. It is possible that he had been in the irregular army in Mexico but also that he served in a non-combatant role along the Mexican border until 1918.

We do not know how or when Engel became interested in photography though it is worth noting that the Mexican Revolution created a boom in production and sales of real photo postcards, particularly in the states along the

border (Vanderwood, 201-225). He was in a place to witness first-hand a nascent and lucrative market.

A lot of what we do know about Engel at the beginning of his photographic career accords with what is known about Burton Frasher (1888-1955), the most prolific of the postcard photographers contemporaneous with Engel. Though Frasher will be discussed in more depth further on, here it is useful to know that prior to World War 1 he worked as a crate maker at fruit farms in California. According to a 1959 interview with his son, Burton Jr., Frasher was drawn to photography through his love of fishing in the Sierra Nevada (Holt, 72). Westwood is in Lassen County in the Sierra Nevada, bordering the state of Nevada. That both men were employed in relatively menial positions in the Californian timber industry and loved fishing give us enough parallels to suggest Engel could have followed the same route to photography as Frasher. Probably, both men began taking photographs for their own pleasure and as their skills developed, realized there was a market for their work.



Fig1:
 Nevada Photo Service: *Nevada Photo Service Exhibit, Transcontinental Highways Exposition.*
 1927
 UNR Special Collections: <http://contentdm.library.unr.edu/u?/lincoln,102>

In 1925 Engel and A. G Cronacher bought a photographic studio in Reno belonging to W W. Still and called it the Nevada Photo Service (UNRS-P90-02/1192). Within a year Cronacher had sold out his interest to Engel. Little is known of Cronacher, though on page 134 of the 1921 *Camera Craft* annual, he is mentioned as having changed his address from Sacramento to Kenosha, Wisconsin. That a photographer would move around is not unusual but it is a neat coincidence that he was working in the two states we know Engel lived in prior to moving to Reno. It suggests the two men worked together prior to moving to Reno.

A small article in column 8, page 8 of the *Reno Gazette*, February 26, 1926; *A. G Cronacher Sells Interest*, reads:

A. G. Cronacher has sold his interest in the Nevada Photo Service and departed today for a tour of Southern Nevada points and California. He expects to locate in Stockton in the near future.

There must have been a change of plan because on 312 of the 1927 edition of the University of Nevada yearbook, *Artemisia*, is an advertisement for the Jewel Photo Studio. Cronacher was the proprietor and is acknowledged as the person behind all the photography in the yearbook. Either he was a restless man by nature or there was some tension that led to a split with Engel.

By this point the Nevada Photo Service (NPS) was already involved in documenting the clearance and redevelopment of Reno's Idlewild Park in preparation for the 1927 Transcontinental Highway Exposition (UNRS-P1992-01-2188).

A photograph of the NPS booth at the Exposition that is held in the University of Nevada Reno Special Collections reveals something about the company's practice at the time (fig 1). The fourteen 8x10 prints fastened to the front apron are scenes from the Expo and on the sides we see various images of Nevada's landscape. The photograph indicates that Engel was already producing postcards and miniature views. Just as importantly, there are no studio portraits of people. This supports a suspicion that became apparent when looking at the archives held at the UNR Special Collections in Reno. While he took some group portraits, Engel did not have any interest in portraiture per se, even though in a small city like Reno there would have been some demand for it (as Cronacher may have discovered when he opened the Jewel Studio.)

An article from page 12 in the *Nevada State Journal* of Sunday January 12, 1941: *Reno Company Equipped to Issue Cards*, indicates that by then the primary business of the Nevada Photo Service lay in film development and printing and in postcards. During the peak summer season the company processed up to 200 rolls of film a day and ran off 2000 prints. The NPS had also installed a Photostat machine, the first in Reno apparently, that allowed it to make copies of legal documents and maps, particularly for the mining industry. (A photograph of Engel operating the Photostat machine is at the top right of the page.) During peak season the company employed eleven people and ran five darkrooms in the basement. Rather breathless in its enthusiasm for the company, the article states that postcards are the most popular form of photograph available to the public and that the NPS produces up to 300 000 cards a year, drawn from 8000 negatives and “distributed to dealers in fifty towns throughout Nevada and the adjoining northern California area.” To take the postcards, Engel made three trips a year around Nevada; “in order to keep (them) up to date”, and he had been doing this for 20 years. From photographs in the UNR Special Collections, we know that during the 1920s the NPS had taken on commissions from mining companies and performed some advertising work for local companies (See for example: UNRS-P1992-01-8969). In the collection of photographs published in *Historic Photos of Reno*, the majority in the chapter covering 1910 to 1929, ‘Emerging Playground’ are credited to the NPS but only two in the next chapter, ‘New Approaches to Economic Development’, which covers 1930 to 1949 are by the NPS (Curtis, 2008). At some point in the 1930s, Engel eased off seeking commissions to concentrate on taking postcards.

The UNR Special Collections includes more than 2000 items from the Nevada Photo Service, including negatives, colour transparencies, hand-coloured prints, proof prints and linen postcards (UNRS-P1992-01). Most of the items are either real photo postcards or the negatives and proof prints that they were printed from. The bulk of the works belong to the Herz Collection. During the 1990s, local doctor and collector James Herz made a series of donations to the UNR Library, including what appears to be the surviving stock from the Nevada Photo Service. Engel's widow Blanche had closed the company in 1960 and, we can assume, either sold or given what remained of the photographic work to Herz (Nevada State Journal, February 25, 1960, 22). If in 1941 the *Nevada State Journal* could claim the company held over 8000 negatives, then most had already been disposed of. It is worth mentioning here that this writer bought twenty NPS postcards in a second-hand store in Istanbul and all were unposted. Knowing the storekeeper, these were probably bought in a job lot from Germany. How they arrived in Germany is a mystery but, now dispersed, NPS postcards are turning up in odd and unexpected corners of the world.

Given the sparse information we have on Engel's life, the Herz Collection is valuable for the light it casts on his working methods. Analysing these provides the best background for placing him in the context of landscape photography.

A photographer's method and something of his or her thinking can be revealed by the choice of camera. A variety of formats have been available to photographers since the 1930s but despite this, large format cameras have long been de rigueur for landscape photographers, based on the reasoning that only a large format camera can do justice to the expanse and the detail of the landscape.

The film however is costly, and the process involved in loading and preparing to press the shutter time consuming. This works against the spontaneous approach that the use of a 35mm camera might encourage. It also implies a reverence for the land no user of a small format Leica could reflect.

Engel's negatives are $3\frac{1}{4}'' \times 5\frac{1}{2}''$ 122 sheet film, for use in a medium format postcard camera such as a Kodak 3A or Graflex 3A. Though both cameras were portable and photographs could be taken without a tripod, the time involved in loading the sheet film and adjusting aperture and focus discouraged snapshot shooting. Rather, as with larger view cameras, the photographer was compelled to deliberate over each photo.





Fig 2 and 3: Two NPS scenes on the highway between Reno and Carson City C1940s. The position of the branches and other details indicate they must have been taken minutes apart. Either Engel could not decide which photo customers would prefer or he did not believe in wasting film. (Author's collection)

Postcard sized negatives had two advantages for a well set up laboratory such as the Nevada Photo Service. Firstly, the prints were contacts, with the negative placed directly on the paper, providing sharp detail that would otherwise be lost in an enlargement. Although the quality of the finished image was superior to an enlargement there was another practical reason for preferring the 122 format. Printing off postcards from contact prints was faster and more efficient. Once the exposure was determined, two people could produce a large number of prints in a couple of hours, by hand or using a printing machine, and as soon as these were dried, they could be distributed. Engel could take a photograph of North Virginia St in Reno in the morning and by lunchtime a couple of hundred copies would be in the racks around town.

While operating the camera was moderately time consuming and Engel paid careful attention to the composition of his images, he shot prolifically. Two

postcards of U.S 40 near Carson City show the same scene taken only minutes and metres apart (figs 2 and 3). Ordinarily we would expect the photographer to choose one to print, particularly if there was little difference between them. From these examples it would appear that, barring the occasional failure, every photograph that Engel took was published as a postcard. Such thinking is contrary to the way high-end commercial studios operated, where a roll of film could be shot off to secure just one image. While we do not have figures to back up the claim made in the 1941 article about the popularity of his real photo postcards, that Engel was producing so many with minor variations suggests demand was high. Just as importantly, the competition among postcard photographers was ruthless. Not only was he up against other Nevada studios, photographers from across the border, so to speak, were travelling the same roads and attempting to win the same concessions he was. He could ill afford to relax if there was a chance his racks would sell out as someone else was liable to come along and fill them up.



Fig 4: Zan-T (Alexander Stark: 1889-1967) *Inside the Silver Stope, Virginia City Nevada, C1940s*. Californian postcard photographer Stark, publishing under the name Zan-T, was another rival for NPS business in Nevada. The important detail here is the rack of postcards at the end of the bar, indicating the diversity of places they were available. (Author's collection)

Engel and the NPS belong to that group of postcard photographers who emerged during the 1920s with the construction of the highways and the beginnings of mass tourism in the U.S. There were dozens working across the western states but while a full accounting of names would be important, two are sufficient for now. Jervie Henry Eastman (1880-1969) worked mostly in northern California, venturing into Oregon and Nevada, and Burton Frasher ranged across the southwest states, from Oregon, California, Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona to Utah. Extensive collections for both photographers are held at Californian institutions, Eastman in the Eastman Studios History archive

at UC Davis and Frasher in the Frasher Foto Postcard Collection at the Pomona Public Library.

Eastman had the longest career of the three. According to the introduction at the UC Davis home page for the collection, he was working as a photographer for the Shasta View Company in Sisson (now Mount Shasta) when he was eighteen and established Eastman & Company in 1921, operating out of Susanville. Speculation is dubious, of course, but Susanville was the nearest town to Westwood so it is not improbable that he and Engel met, especially if both were interested in landscape photography.

Like most of the postcard photographers, Eastman was eclectic, shooting scenes of natural and constructed landmarks, streetscapes, wilderness, farm life, wildlife, tourist resorts and industrial works, in short, any subject deemed commercially viable. Frasher's Fotos, as the company was named, made some candid postcards of Hollywood celebrities and Native Americans and was official photographer to the Los Angeles County Fair. Like Engel, Frasher also made novelty cards where scenes were obviously staged or elements were montaged on to a landscape (figs 5 and 6). (This last category is an important reminder that the photographers considered the success of their images in commercial rather than artistic terms.)

When we take the common imagery of their work, the infrastructure of tourism, its highways and architecture in particular, the individual character of their work is distinguished more by territory than approach. Working in the mountainous and forested region of northern California, Eastman's space is more confined. Roads rarely disappear into a distant horizon as they do in a typical

NPS scene of the desert highway. On the other hand, both men took photographs of Pyramid Lake outside of Reno that are so close in appearance that only the identifiable marks of the studio set them apart. Likewise, Engel and Frasher depicted the desert architecture of roadhouses and gas stations in a similarly direct, so called documentary style. Two postcards of the *Morning on the Desert* poem show how their work could be indistinguishable (figs 7 and 8). Some Frasher Fotos postcards depict Arizona in a consciously romantic way, with cards titled “A Desert Sunset” showing cactuses framed against the horizon (<http://content.ci.pomona.ca.us/u/?/Frasher,7413>). To say that Engel would not have taken the same approach is a moot point. Though the saguaro is the iconic plant of the southwest and an image of one immediately locates it in the viewer’s imagination, it does not grow in Nevada, hence Engel was denied that opportunity.



Fig 5: Nevada Photo Service, *Untitled*, c1940s.
A photomontage drawing on some stereotypes of the Nevada Desert.
(Author’s collection)



Fig 6: Nevada Photo Service (Attributed), *A Nevada Desert Canary*, c1940s.
The same mule in the image above but reversed.
(Author's collection)

In 1959, the director of the Pomona Public Library, Raymond Holt, interviewed Frasher's son, Burton Jr. about his father's work. *Frasher's Fotos – Postcard King of the West* may be the closest we have to a first hand account of the work practices of a postcard photographer. Though similarities in their backgrounds have already been noted, there are several significant differences between the two that would make a complete comparison flawed. For one, Frasher ran a much larger company and, as indicated in the article, employed several photographers (Holt, 76). The territory he covered was much wider. According to Burton Jr, at one point demand for the postcards became so high that Burton Sr. was obliged to enter into an arrangement with the Oregon postcard company Sawyers that he would continue to work through the

southwest while they kept to the northern states (Holt, 76). This, incidentally, is the best evidence we have that photographers entered into arrangements regarding territory or concessions. The general impression is that business was more cutthroat; one photographed and sold where possible.

More pertinent to Engel's work are revelations regarding the economics of production. In the company's early days this involved personal contact with customers and agents, much as itinerant photographers had worked through the Nineteenth century.

Every morning the folks would put me on board the ship and then start their rounds of selling, filling orders and taking new views. As the steamer made its leisurely way around the lake (Tahoe) hauling passengers, freight and mail, they could get in a full day's work. The skipper made sure I didn't fall overboard or wander ashore before we reached home port in the evening. (Holt, 74)

From what Burton Jr. says, his parents may have also been selling postcards from their car. A website dedicated to Oregon postcards, indicates that this was how Arthur Cross and Edward Dimmitt of Cross & Dimmitt operated until the 1920s when they opened a studio in Portland.

(http://www.pdxhistory.com/html/post_card_history.html)

Good postcard business, Frasher Jr. adds; depends upon the artistic merit of the original photograph and its proper reproduction. This can best be done by small companies or man-and-wife teams concentrating on limited areas (Holt, 78).

The problem that led Frasher's Fotos to reach an agreement with the Sawyer Company was that the company had overextended its reach and could not guarantee constant supply to outlying areas. A smaller territory was more

manageable and efficient. This underscores a situation that affected Engel's business as well. Postcards may have been popular but the success of the business depended upon maintaining supply. Short of turning into a major firm like the Detroit Publishing Company, the solution was to remain small and relatively localized. When the NPS decreased its commissioned work in favour of postcard production, it may not have been potential profits so much as the time and effort involved in sustaining the postcard side of the business that ultimately forced the decision.

Frasher Jr. acknowledged that determining the popularity of particular images was difficult, if not mysterious. Referring to a series of views taken one day of Carson City, Nevada, he says that the merchants wanted the long distance views of the street yet customers much preferred the close up shots (Holt, 76). Out on the road, Frasher and Engel would have encountered scenes that struck them as obvious sellers but the success of the image would be unknown until the sales records were returned. One way to deal with this was to take several photographs and leave it to the customers to decide. The two nearly identical postcards of the road near Carson City may demonstrate indecision on Engel's part, not so much for the quality of the composition but because of his uncertainty as to which one his customers would prefer. Asked which of the company's 60 000 postcards was the most popular, Frasher Jr. pointed to an unexceptional looking image of a donkey foal titled 'Native Son' and said that it had sold over three million postcards (Holt, 78).

Chapter 2: On The Road

The most important coincidence between Engel and Frasher and Eastman has nothing to do with their shared aesthetic (which was not uniquely theirs in the first place) but their birthdates. All were born in the 1880s, placing them in their early to mid 20s when the Ford Model T first rolled off production lines in 1908. They belonged to the youngest generation that could afford to buy and drive a car. Just as importantly, in a few years they would be part of that last generation to remember the world before the automobile. This would shape their relationship with the car in a distinct way. They would adapt to its presence faster than their parents without taking it for granted as people born in the next decade would.

The access that cars provided became central to these photographers' lives. As Burton Frasher Jr. explained in the Holt interview, a car allowed his father to travel around the Sierra Nevada in search of fishing sites (72). This led to his discovery of the landscape and its potential as a subject for photographs. A similar revelation can be discerned in Eastman's work. His photographs held in the UC Davis collection that were taken in the pre-war era are either concerned with local social events and industry or are views of towns in the Sierra region. Once the Eastman Company was set up in 1921 he began to travel more widely and his subject and approach expanded along with the territory.

Mass-produced automobiles made the construction of a proper highway system in the U.S both feasible and imperative. In 1912 the first transcontinental road across the U.S, the Lincoln Highway, was mapped out. By 1919 the Nevadan

section, from Wendover on the Utah border to Reno, was in operation, even if future President Dwight Eisenhower described it as “a succession of dust, ruts, pits and holes” when he travelled along it that year (Eisenhower letter, 1919). The politics surrounding the construction were fraught and partly because of fractious lobbying, partly to avoid crossing the salt pans on the border, the decision was made for the road to enter Nevada at Wendover and turn south to Ely. From there it would cross the middle of the state, passing through Austin, Fallon and Carson City before entering the Sierra Nevada mountain range on the southern edge of Lake Tahoe. In 1921 construction of a second route, the Victory Highway, began. This would follow an original course intended for the Lincoln Highway, also entering at Wendover but cutting across the north of the state, through Wells, Elko and Winnemucca and providing a more direct connection between Utah and Reno (Rose in Riatz, Thompson, Pauer, 160-196).

Both arterial roads followed historically important routes: the Victory ran along the Humboldt River trail, used by wagon train pioneers such as the 1846 Donner party, and the Lincoln traced the Nevada section of the Pony Express. The significance of these trails, not just to the history but the mythology of the American west would not be lost on postcard photographers.

The highways were constructed by consortiums funded by federal and state grants as well as private interests. Their success however would depend upon the peripheral and independently built infrastructure of gas stations, motels and roadhouses. This infrastructure would prove crucial for sparsely populated Nevada because although the highways were obviously important for

interstate commerce and freight, the promotion of the highways was aimed at the new breed of automobile traveller, the tourist (Jakle, Sculle, 1990, 1-5).

In 1915 the Lincoln Highway Association published the first edition of *The Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway*. Apart from giving the vital statistics for every town along the way, the handbook carried advertisements for automobile companies and local motels and gas stations. More important were the travel advisories, noting the speed limits for each state (in Nevada it was 20 mph), that the journey should take between twenty and thirty days and it recommended that travellers carry with them two jacks, tire chains, two sets of spark plugs, eight feet each of high and low tension cable, three cans of oil, an axe and a shovel and a set of spare lamps along with other automotive accessories (18). The guide warned that the road between Salt Lake City and Ely in Nevada “should not be lightly attempted” (46). A trip across America was not a holiday so much as a voyage of exploration.

The feature of the west that the guidebooks promoted most heavily was the open space, with its corollaries of distance and isolation. These were still regarded as intimidating; only people of tough and individualistic characters were supposed to be able to endure them but this did not mean they could not be experienced vicariously, from the inside of a car. Through images in guidebooks and magazines, tourists travelling across the west were constantly reminded that having left the confines of the city they would be on roads where, so far as they knew, theirs was the only vehicle on it.

Space was synonymous with independence. In the 1930s the Nevada Photo Service, Frasher’s Fotos and several other companies produced nearly

identical postcards carrying the poem *Mornin' on the Desert* above a scene of a track cutting through the sagebrush. Versions printed in garish colours on linen bore an unmistakeable resemblance to holy cards.

The first of the six verses reads:

*Morning on the desert, and the wind is blowin' free,
And it's ours jest for the breathin', so let's fill up, you an' me.
No more stuffy cities where you have to pay to breathe.
Where the helpless, human creatures, throng, and move, and strive and seethe.*

Originally published by Katharine Fell Pettey in a 1910 volume of western poetry, *Songs from the Sage Brush*, the anonymous poem was purportedly found either scrawled or nailed to the door of an abandoned shanty somewhere in the desert. Though the poem's authenticity is as dubious as its quality, the popularity of the postcard is not surprising considering that the message corresponded to an ideality of the west promoted to tourists. Whatever the desert lacked in terms of sophisticated amusements, it more than compensated with a wholesome lifestyle unaffected by time or any of the other pressures city dwellers had to put up with.

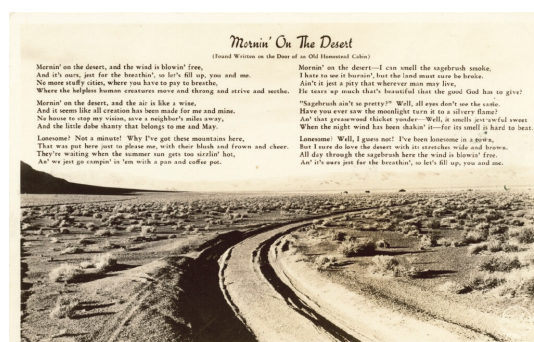
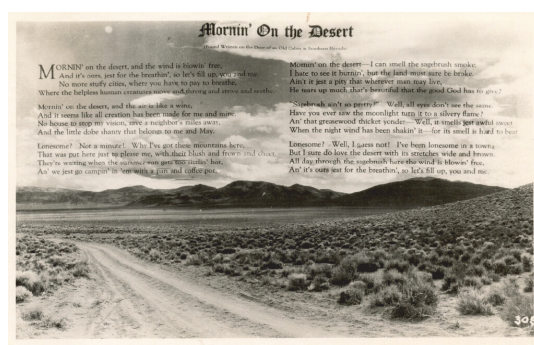


Fig 7 and 8: Two postcards showing the *Morning on the Desert* poem. The top image can attributed to the NPS because the same scene of the road appears in another card. The lower image bears the Frasher's Fotos stamp in the bottom right. Both are C1930s to 1940s. (Author's collection)

The consortiums and tourism promoters must have been aware of the contradictions in what they were selling. If everybody was being exhorted to hit the open roads, those roads would not be empty for long. Simultaneously, while tourists were tirelessly reminded they were travelling routes charted by pioneers only a couple of generations earlier, they were assured their journey would be as comfortable as possible. There would be a sufficiency of civilized outposts by way of gas stations, motels and roadhouses along the way. Even billboards, mere advertising space in big cities, were reminders that travellers were isolated but not alone. Gas, food or lodgings were only a couple of miles further on.

Another contradiction could be read into the poem. It exulted in a life close to nature as something precious and available to only a few, but the story built around the poem; the solitary prospector or ranch-hand, the isolated cabin, the chance discovery of the verses, belonged to a time and a place that existed before the highways. Like the wind blowing tumbleweeds along the empty street, the author may as well have been the spectral inhabitant of one of the desert's numerous ghost towns.

In the introduction to her book, *Road Frames*, Kris Lackey makes a useful observation on how the west was viewed by tourists from the 1920s onwards.

"Unlike the repeating rifle or even the locomotive, the automobile was ... an innocent machine when it arrived. It did not help win the West" (3).

In Nevada in the late 1920s, where the history, or more accurately the myth, of the American West became one of the main attractions, there would have still been people about who had lived through the era of the Indian wars and the lawless frontier. In that sense, history was still living but the presence of highways, major construction projects, such as the Boulder Dam and the car itself, were a measure of how rapid and successful development had been. If cars did not help win the west, the people who travelled in them could still witness what had become the nation's foundation story.

The history of the American west that was fed into the popular imagination by way of films and novels essentially begins in the mid-1840s with a trickle of wagon trains then properly comes to life with the 1849 Californian Gold Rush.³ Any earlier history that Native Americans had with the land was mentioned in passing, and though there had been the war with Mexico in 1846 and a scattering of old Spanish missions reminded people of something older, these were only a prelude. The story of the wagon train pioneers was stained with hardship and tragedy; the descent into cannibalism among members of the Donner Party being a vivid warning to others. From there it developed through a series of stage posts: the Gold Rush, the arrival of the telegraph, the construction of the railways in the 1860s, the conquest of indigenous people, and the simultaneous bringing of European settlements under the control of law.

By the time the highway and the automobile arrived, it was understood that the essential conflicts in these narratives had been resolved yet their

³ See for example, Richard Slotkin. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Atheneum, 1992, pp 194-254. The third in a trilogy of works in which Slotkin examines the frontier myth in American culture, in chapters 6 and 7 he pays particular attention to the image of the West in pulp fiction and cinema.

imagery remained potent.⁴ Emblems of the Wild West: the covered wagon, the prospector, the cowboy, the gunslinger and the Navajo or Apache warrior could be found all over the southwest, from tipi motels to neon cowpokes, from faux saloon style architecture to Hopi ceremonial dances put on for the tourists. To travel out west without experiencing the artifacts of that world, whether that meant staying at a dude ranch, driving out to ghost towns or being photographed dressed as an outlaw was to miss the point.

Those reminders of Nevada's history that tourists encountered celebrated the moral and technological triumph over the land and its original inhabitants. They could indulge in the legend spared of its realities. The photographers were mindful of this, hence the Nevada Photo Service postcard of the prospector, his mule and the obviously drawn in sign.

As a postcard photographer, Engel assumed a role mediating between the promoters' assurances and the expectations of tourists. These were not necessarily competing – the wide open spaces and relics of the wild west could be found easily enough – but they did direct his approach. When photographing along the Lincoln and Victory Highways he occupied a middle ground, supposedly objective and viewing his subjects as topographical facts. To do that, involved creating a particular look to his images while removing his presence as much as possible. Paraphrasing the quote by Jorge Luis Borges that William Jenkins used at the head of his introduction to the *New Topographics* exhibition

⁴ In *The Necessity for Ruins*, J. B. Jackson writes: *Anyone who travels through the United States must be aware of the widespread delight in what we can call reconstructed historical environments ... We run across numerous examples of Colonial Villages and Pioneer Villages and Frontier Villages and Army Posts (that allow us to watch the scheduled Indian raid or stagecoach holdup or the noonday shootout* (1980, p90).

catalogue in 1975: not 'in somebody else's style – but in the style of *anybody* else"
(p5).⁵

⁵ The full quote reads: *I will try to write a book, a book so good that nobody will think I have written it. I would write a book – I won't say in somebody else's style – but in the style of anybody else.* (Borges, 1975, 719)

Chapter 3: Beyond Main Street

The postcard photographer of the 1930s and 40s was by definition promiscuous. Concepts such as genre, style or aesthetic that other photographers would have regarded as signatures were sublimated when the chief criterion behind the image was its conceivable popularity as a postcard. No matter how successful the original photograph may have been, it was always potential as a base for a coloured large letter or linen postcard, or selected parts could be used in a photomontage.⁶ Originality was not actively encouraged. Sites such as Yosemite Valley offered a multitude of choices for photographers but the number that worked for postcards was extremely limited.

This was in part because the postcard photographer believed in the obligation to create images that compared with the experiences of tourists. Timothy Van Laar's examination of the banality of postcard images in *Postcards; Ephemeral Histories of Modernity* points out that photographers often chose viewpoints that emphasise the ordinariness of a place, but to expect otherwise was to assume their responsibility lay in revealing something new when it was more important to show something recognizable (Prochaska, Mendelson, 196).⁷

In his brief history of the photography of the Grand Canyon, 'Visualizing Eternity', David Nye argues that its late recognition as a national park had to do with the inability to comprehend its size through photographs (Nye in Schwartz, Ryan, 74-96). The earliest photographers to venture in, John K. Hillers and James

⁶ 'Large letter' is a technical term, or one used by deltiologists, to describe postcards that have the name of the place in large capitals across the front; "RENO" or "NEVADA", often filled in with images. Linen cards were brightly coloured and printed on textured paper.

⁷ Timothy Van Laar. *Views of the Ordinary and Other Scenic Disappointments*, 194-202.

Fennemore, members of the 1871 Powell Expedition, documented the Canyon in detail, less interested in its size than its numerous aspects (Hillers, 1972, 15-18). As more visitors came to the Canyon however, that single image that could transmit the expanse proved too elusive. Stereographs provided an illusion of depth but when photographers recognized they could not capture the dimensions they turned instead to photographing the relationship that people had with the Canyon. Instead of following in the Powell Expedition's footsteps and discovering hidden wonders, they remained at signposted viewing points, often aiming their camera to include the tourists as well. It was not just the view that the tourist wanted to share when they mailed off a postcard but their experience of it. The anonymous people clustered at a railing in the image represented themselves

Photographers therefore followed unwritten rules that certain subjects required a specific point of view. A typical example is the streetscape. Engel made a point of photographing every settlement along the Lincoln and Victory Highways and his views of the main streets accord with basic principles. The camera was set up in the middle of the road so the buildings on both sides merged towards a vanishing point, or at an angle so that the facades on one side, usually the one receiving full sunlight, were seen in more detail.

When Jakle and Sculle defined the two prevailing representations of the American main street as being its uniformity and parochialism, they were thinking of how it is depicted broadly across literature, fine art and middlebrow culture (2004, p18). Looking through postcards, the uniformity quickly becomes plain: Main Street, small town Nevada looks a lot like Main Street, small town

Kentucky. If parochialism is more difficult to discern that is only because it was something photographers did not actively emphasize.

This commonplace approach may strike us as a failure of imagination but for travellers passing through, a postcard of the streetscape could tell them all they needed to know about the size of the town, its culture, and even its pace of life. The view of Battle Mountain's main street that Engel took, probably in the early 1930s (fig 30), shows a town clinging to the vestige atmosphere of the Wild West and where things moved a lot slower than they did in Reno.

Walker Evans referred to this straight, basic and ubiquitous approach as 'lyric documentary' (Rosenheim, 103). Later writers called it 'authorless' (Batchen, 30). Both terms are problematic, the second more so because it implies the absence of an author (or photographer) when it more accurately refers to a particular aesthetic approach. Some of Evans's works that employ this authorless style are immediately identifiable as his. 'Lyric' on the other hand suggests a poetic expression of feeling when the type of work that Evans was thinking about was presented as statements of fact, possessing "a certain severity, rigor, simplicity, directness, clarity ... without artistic pretentiousness" (Evans in Rosenheim, 106).

Without being too pedantic, we can understand 'authorless' to have two meanings. The first refers to the depiction of a scene aspiring to an objectivity that does not ask for interpretation. Many of the topographical photographs that the NPS took fall within this definition in that we are under no obligation to bring any more to the reading than Engel already provided. The photograph of the Lincoln County Courthouse is just such an example (fig: 43). It epitomizes

Evans's principles; what Salvesan calls more dispassionately, "an anonymous, ephemeral application of [the] medium" (Foster-Rice, Rohrbach, 71).

But just as no photograph is immune to interpretation, no photographer sets out to take images that are above it. The second meaning draws on the way Jenkins used the Borges quote; 'authorless' suggesting a scene resisting a deeper reading not so much from viewers but by the photographer. Borges was being ironic, implying that the apparent simplicity of his stories involved a simultaneous ease in writing them when in fact it took effort and imagination to pare them back to their essentials. Jenkins was aware of this. Despite impressions to the contrary, the successful authorless style was carefully considered. Evans' visually spare studies of southern churches allowed them to be seen as a typology. In the case of postcard photographers like Engel, Frasher and Eastman, point of view was dictated by the commercial imperative to meet the customer's expectations. So long as the customer, 'the average man in the street', remained a rather amorphous figure, with broad but vaguely defined tastes, avoidance of artistic pretentiousness was advised. The results however are not dissimilar to what Evans wanted to achieve. Viewed collectively, NPS views of small town streetscapes and highway scenes have that same rational and systematic organization of visual information, the 'lyricism' that Evans employed.⁸

Writing about commercial street photography as practised in the 1930s, Geoffrey Batchen has argued that the banality and ordinariness of so many images; "refuse to make themselves available to three of the central organizing

⁸ And collected. In 2009 the Metropolitan Museum exhibited hundreds of the postcards from Evans's collection in *Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard*. Placed alongside his own work, their influence was immediately apparent.

principles of photographic history ... innovation, biography, and nationalism” (30). The first two criteria are apparent in the NPS postcards; we have seen how some are nearly identical to others taken by Frasher’s Fotos and belong to what we might call a generic tradition. If the third is less so, that is only because Batchen is specifically referring to a form of photography that is more commonly considered vernacular, in part because it does not rely on location to distinguish or identify the photographer. Had Batchen been considering postcards of the American landscape, his argument could be sustained by pointing out that it was the subject matter rather than the aesthetic that defined any quality of nationalism. We can find German and French postcards that used the same approach and point of view to depict alpine villages.

Batchen’s point is central to the problem of analysing ‘authorless’ postcards. That refusal of postcard images to make themselves available to standard forms of analysis does not necessarily obviate an authorial presence. To find one we have to ignore standard benchmarks and look for other aspects.

The gas stations, motels and diners along the Nevada highways were sales points for Engel, so he had another purpose for photographing them apart from their being landmarks along the route. It is less obvious why he would photograph government buildings such as courthouses, post offices and schools. They were not outlets for his postcards and few tourists would have considered them essential places to visit. But tourists were not his only customers. The inhabitants of small towns would also send out postcards. For someone who lived in Pioche, a view of the new courthouse would have represented more than an architectural example. It could also be a statement about the whole town.

Between the 1870s and the 1930s most US civic buildings were designed in the Classical Revival, or as it was often labelled in America, Colonial Revival style (Axelrod, 1985). It invoked the spirit of Thomas Jefferson and the founders of the republic, who themselves had found inspiration in classical Greek and Roman literature, philosophy and statecraft. The most visible elements were the domed roofs, pediments and fluted columns. The Nevada courthouses at Reno, Lovelock and Fallon are examples of a type found throughout the country and did not inherently belong to the West (see fig 19).

During the New Deal era of the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) began a program that involved construction of civic buildings across the US. The architectural description 'WPA Moderne' is of recent origin and a variant on the older 'Art Moderne' and 'Streamline Moderne', which themselves came out of European Art Deco. It is used, as one might expect, for these civic buildings whereas the other two refer more to commercial sites such as motels.

WPA Moderne was not indigenous to the West either but apart from being contemporary there were practical reasons behind it being the preferred style for government commissions. The reducing of design elements to the surface of the building and the abandoning of extraneous features such as porticos and columns saved money, and the WPA was under constant pressure to account for every dollar it spent. (Leighninger, 226) The original Lincoln County Courthouse in Pioche had become a notorious symbol of government extravagance when it was built in 1872. The original budget was \$26 000 but it ended up costing almost one million dollars by completion. In 1937 A. Lacy Worswick designed the

new courthouse for the WPA in the Moderne style (fig 43). It cost less than \$50 000 (Nicoletta, Morgan, 254).

By bringing contemporary architecture to Nevada, the New Deal agencies transformed it not just economically but visually. The most vivid example of this was the Boulder Dam, constructed between 1931 and 1936. Though planned in the 1920s as a way to irrigate the desert and provide hydro-electric power, it became a Bureau of Reclamation project associated with the Roosevelt rather than the Coolidge administration. One of the sculptors attached to the project, Oscar Hansen, cast monuments in the contemporary Art Deco style as grandiose, even bombastic statements about American supremacy. The faces of the two winged figures representing the early pioneers gazed across Nevada with a stoic dignity that Hansen called “the look of eagles” (Hansen, 8). He would also equate the Hoover Dam with the Egyptian pyramids, the Acropolis in Athens and Chartres Cathedral. A star map on the floor of the main hall indicated the hour of the Dam’s dedication (8:56 on the evening of September 30, 1935) and the birth of Christ (Hansen, 3-8).

A little over a year after the Hoover Dam was dedicated, on November 23, 1936, *Life* magazine was launched. The cover image was Margaret Bourke-White’s study of Fort Peck Dam in Montana (Brown, 1972, 56). At first glance the structure with its towers and battlements could pass for a medieval castle but Bourke-White’s outlook was decidedly modernist, eschewing the literal in favour of form and asking us to consider shape and texture above other values. Photography would be one of the magazine’s strengths and the choice of this

image consciously sent a message to the readers that in the midst of an economic depression, America was driven by a visionary and indomitable spirit.

Down below, so to speak, small towns like Pioche, did not have any great engineering projects in the vicinity to celebrate but the same progressive spirit was evident. Even the smallest of towns were showcases of contemporary culture. If tourists were not likely to show great interest in the new courthouse, the inhabitants would have.

The NPS view of the post office at Lovelock also echoes the values Evans sought in the 'lyric documentary' approach (fig 20). Engel made several postcards of the post office, including at least one that showed adjoining buildings, so analysis of the view illustrated here should be placed in context. Taken at an angle, and occupying a space delineated evenly between the road and the sky, the building provides viewers with all the information needed regarding its form, dimensions and use. The only other structure to distract from the building is the American flag, which is of course a part of it. Photographing buildings from this point of view was not distinct to modernist architecture but it did emphasise clean, straight lines; which Evans would go on to describe as "hard and firm" (Rosenheim, 106).

There is one case among the NPS postcards where the representation of modernist design was undeniably integral to the images. A typical example of Streamline Moderne, the Sonoma Inn was built in 1947, too late to be an innovation in style though that probably did not concern Engel. Soon after it opened, he produced a series of real photo postcards of the interior. Although he made postcards showing the interiors of Reno casinos, this is the only series

known at present in which he photographed the interior of a motel. Presumably, these were taken under arrangement with the management and someone directed Engel towards the scenes, outlining what he or she wanted to draw attention to.

The postcards of the lobby and the cocktail bar show their open plan design and contemporary furnishings (figs 9, 10). Though Winnemucca was a small town in a thinly populated state, these images would have reinforced the presence of a modernist style that could belong to any four-star establishment in any American city.

Of particular note however are the images of the swimming pool (figs 11, 12). The view taken outside presents an essential and innocuous description, an advertisement that the establishment had a pool. The photograph taken from inside however is open to more analysis. The frame created by the door and windows breaks up the scene outside into a series of compartments but it also distracts from the central subject, the pool. More than the other photograph, it conveys a personal impression, something authorless postcards were supposed to avoid.

Selecting a few images and presenting them as evidence for an overriding concern is problematic, especially as Engel appears to have left no written statements regarding his approach or aesthetics. But if he had no strong opinions about modernism as an art theory that we know of, he was very much interested in modern design. In the 1970s John Margolies began documenting roadside architecture of the 1930s and 40s, aware of its place in popular culture and concerned that a lot of it would soon be lost to redevelopment (1981). He is only

one among dozens of photographers and historians who have recorded what are often the remnants of a style or expression that more high-minded art historians deplored as kitsch⁹. Contemporaneous with Margolies, road movies such as *Easy Rider*, *Duel* and *Bagdad Cafe* turned the desert gas station into an icon of popular culture evoking isolation or desolation.¹⁰



Fig 9: NPS, *Lobby Sonoma Inn*. C 1947-53.
 Note the postcard rack to the left of the concierge and the photo-mural of the cattle. Was this an NPS image?

⁹ Dwight MacDonald begins the penultimate section to his famous essay 'Masscult and Midcult' with the rhetorical and ironic question: "What is to be done? Conservatives like Ortega y Gasset and T. S. Eliot argue that since the "revolt of the masses" has led to the horrors of totalitarianism and of Californian roadside architecture, the only hope is to rebuild the old class walls and bring the masses once more under aristocratic control" (p69).

¹⁰ *Easy Rider*, Dennis Hopper, 1969, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0064276/?ref=nv_sr_1. *Duel*, Steven Spielberg, 1971, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0067023/?ref=nv_sr_1. *Bagdad Café*, Percy Adlon, 1987, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0095801/?ref=nv_sr_1. (accessed March 12, 2014)



Fig 10: NPS, *Cocktail Room Sonoma Inn*, C1947-53



Fig 11: NPS, *Swimming Pool, Sonoma Inn*, C1947-53.



Fig 12: NPS, *Swimming Pool, Sonoma Inn*, C1947-53.
All four images promote the contemporary feel of the Sonoma Inn.

Given the interest in roadside architecture, we can regard the images of the Highway Fountain at Wells (fig 40) or the diner at Valmy (fig 29) as records of a vanished vernacular. Critically however, when Engel photographed them they were new, having been built within the last ten years. His images depict the very opposite of the crumbling wasteland. The buildings are clean, without any signs of dilapidation, and just as importantly, they have customers. These are places for human contact and communication.

There is another, equally important element to the scenes of gas stations and diners to consider. While the flat and orthodox composition in the postcard of Painted Rock (fig 22) may persuade us away from a deep reading on Engel's intentions, the image suggests that rather than being a vulgar intrusion, the buildings have adapted naturally to the landscape. They belong there, in much the same way skyscrapers belong in New York.

In *Road Frames* Lackey notes the number of travelogues of the West written between the 1920s and the 1940s by women from eastern cities: books such *Green Mountains to Sierras* by Zephine Humphrey, *A Long Way from Boston* by Beth O'Shea and *Westward Hoboes* by Winifred Hawkrigde Dixon (28). To these writers, the Southwest was a world of inspiring landscapes and less impressive people. A common image of the male inhabitant of states like Arizona and Nevada casts him as well-meaning but unsophisticated, preserved in aspic so far as the mercurial world of contemporary ideas was concerned and astonished that two women would think of travelling out there by themselves.

If this was an attitude widespread among the educated residents of New York and Chicago, Engel would have had good cause for opposing it. Firstly for the aspersions it cast upon him but so far as business was concerned, it also discouraged tourists. Dixon, O'Shea and Humphrey avoided Nevada. The scenes from the interior of the Sonoma Inn however indicate that travellers could expect the same standards of amenities they were used to back home. The signage on the Highway Fountain tells them they can find all the creature comforts they need at this point in their journey, and far from Nevada being a land of ghost towns, it contained some distinctive examples of contemporary and homegrown design. We may not have statements from Engel supporting a thesis that he wanted to show a state being transformed, but we can understand he had motives for doing so.

Winifred Dixon was struck by the 'eerie charm' of the desert when she first entered it, apprehensive but also thrilled to have turned her back on

civilization (1921, 64). Geographically, Nevada is dominated by desert and low mountains but the landmark wonders of the southwest that draw in tourists: the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley and the Painted Desert are outside its borders. The best Nevada had to offer tourists in the 1930s and 40s was Lake Tahoe, which, if they were travelling westwards, lay on the border with California so marked the exit. Not a lot had changed since gold rush journalist Alfred S. Doten disparaged the territory as good for mining but “not worth living in” (Doten, Vol1, 714).

Nevada’s dependence on mining was parlous. Towns like Pioche and Goldfield barely survived the bust when the mines dried up. The most dramatic example of boom and bust was Rhyolite in Bullfrog. Established in 1905 when gold was discovered in the nearby hills, by 1910 the rush had ended and ten years later it was marked on tourist maps as a ghost town (Hulse, 172). Mining however was central to Nevada’s identity and when Engel turned his camera away from the architecture and the highway towards the desert landscape he often incorporated evidence of it.

A high number of his landscape views have an element of human presence in them. There are examples, such as the scene of Battle Mountain with the initials engraved in chalk, where it is clear that this presence was the subject. Others are less obvious. In “Mt Scene U.S 40 Lovelock to Winnemucca” (fig 21), the telegraph poles in the middle-ground are barely discernable, while in another, “Ruby Mts from Wells Nev.” a solitary figure occupies the centre of the frame but is so small that he could easily be overlooked (fig 37). In “Nevada

Desert Country” an indeterminate structure lies behind the granite outcrop (fig 26).

Although it is plausible that Engel sought out these signs of the altered landscape as themes or motifs in his work, we must first consider that he found them hard to avoid. Just as the highways he remained close to followed pioneer trails, so did the telegraph and railways. Telegraph poles, tracks leading to mining camps and billboards lined the Lincoln Highway. In order to depict the desert free from human presence, he would have had to have left the car and walked out. A distinctive aspect to the NPS postcards however is that Engel depicted not just the view of the landscape but the experience of passing through it that the driver would have had. Few, if any, of his photographs show places others did not have access to by car.

One place on the map of Nevada that qualified as a natural wonder for tourists was Pyramid Lake. Some forty miles northeast of Reno, it was named for the tufa outcrop by the eastern shoreline. In 1868 Timothy O’Sullivan took a photograph of the outcrop that would become one of the most reproduced examples of Nineteenth century American landscape photography (Naef, Wood, plate 40). Two clusters of boulders lead from the shore to the pyramid with the opposite shoreline a faint haze on the horizon. In some prints the pyramid appears to be rising eerily from the mist.¹¹

In 1979, Mark Klett took a photograph from the same position as O’Sullivan for the Second View Re-photographic Project that showed how the water had been drained back to reveal the dried-out lake bed (Klett, Manchester,

¹¹ Compare this image with the one reproduced on page 56 of *Perpetual Mirage* (Castleberry et al: 1996).

Verburg, 1984, 57)). The photograph made a stark point about environmental degradation and the effect of industrialization on the landscape.

In between O'Sullivan and Klett, the NPS, Eastman's Studios and Frasher's Fotos produced postcards of Pyramid Lake¹². None attempted to emulate O'Sullivan's transcendent view. The most they aspired to was a representation of the pyramid in its relation to the shore (fig 17). Though we cannot exclude the possibility they were unaware of O'Sullivan's photograph, their various but similar points of view reveal a way the image of the landscape had changed in popular culture.

O'Sullivan made his photograph mindful of several responsibilities. His brief on the King Survey of the 40th Parallel was to document the physical appearance of the terrain, including its geology and plant and animal life, with a view to its prospects for agriculture. Boosting the territory for potential settlers depended upon making the geography look as attractive as possible. He was also, on King's request rather than the Government's, searching for evidence of catastrophism, the theory that the geology of the Earth had been created through a series of violent events (King, 1877, 449-470). O'Sullivan's view of the rock formations on Pyramid Lake was valuable to King as possible evidence of a prehistoric inland sea; for the Government it depicted natural beauty and the presence of water, two details critical in appealing to those potential settlers. In both cases the success of the image lay in its mystery.

¹² See for examples: <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/tf80000781/?order=1> at Eastman Originals Collection, UC Davis.

By the time Engel, Frasher and Eastman photographed the lake, some fifty years later, thousands may have already visited it. It was a popular fishing spot for Reno residents in the 1920s.¹³ Though some may have been lucky enough to visit at dawn when the rocks were wreathed in mist, the quality of strangeness that early photographers like O'Sullivan found had been diluted by familiarity. Most probably saw it as the postcard photographers did: geographically interesting but not magical. It is not the ordinariness of the landscape that matters in these images but that sense of the ordinary transmitted through them. One NPS postcard shows the road leading in with the lake in the middle ground and a small group of cattle grazing among the sagebrush (fig 16). It is a pretty enough scene but hardly exceptional. It told tourists that the lake was accessible by car but also, not what they ought to have seen but what they would. Like the views of the Grand Canyon showing visitors gathered at the edge that Nye referred to, it is as much about the act of being a tourist as it is a landscape scene.

If Engel allowed himself the benefit of a more interpretive approach, that can be found in his views of the highways. They curve gracefully around mountainsides and wind serpent-like across the lowlands but especially they stretch in a straight line to disappear into the horizon. Though highway views belong within the category of landscapes, there is a distinct reverence in them absent from his more conventional desert scenes.

It may be that for every postcard photographer in the American West the highway was another standard motif, a tangible representation of the act of travel, and that in structure or meaning Engel's images ought not be emphasized

¹³ Apparently the lake was especially popular with Hollywood stars. <http://www.nevadaweb.com/cnt/r-t/pyramid/>, (accessed Feb 23, 2014).

too strongly. As mentioned earlier however, he was in a state where the highways cut straight across the landscape and dominated it, not just physically but culturally as well. All of his postcards taken outside of Reno, those of the gas stations, streetscapes, modernist buildings and views of the snow-capped mountains, are fundamentally connected to the highways. Roads provided accessibility to the landmarks and small towns. If the Boulder Dam was the realization of a grand American vision, as triumphs of engineering the highways had a more far-reaching impact on Nevada.

Engel and the other postcard producers were not the only photographers to realize this. In 1953, the year Engel died, George R. Stewart published a travelogue; *U.S 40: cross section of the United States of America*. To Stewart U.S 40 represented the nation in a microcosm. Geographically it dissected the nation through its centre, from Atlantic City to San Francisco. Culturally, the nation's history unfolded along it, from the original pilgrim settlers through the American Revolution, the Gold Rush, the Civil War and the construction of the railroads and highways. As a popular historian Stewart understood the value of narrative to his readers and he supplemented the text with his own photographs, which appear on every second page. The intention was to provide a visual complement to the story so that readers as armchair travellers could take the journey with him. Stylistically his photographs are similar to postcards, with a straightforward point of view that consciously includes the essential details, leaving little need for interpretation. Though the highway appears in every photograph, the subjects are usually found on the roadside: historic buildings, billboards, wheat fields and the like. Once Stewart reaches Nevada however the road itself prevails.

It fills the frame, following a straight line that narrows to a vanishing point on the horizon or cuts diagonally across a birds-eye view of a flat, dry terrain (244-249). The desert and the highway become symbiotic.

That scene of the highway cutting across the desert in a straight line to end at a sharp point, often below a distant mountain range, had been used by Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, and would later be picked up by Robert Frank, Stephen Shore and Robert Adams¹⁴. Because of their stature as photographers, we tend to invest their images with readings or meanings we would not grant to a mere postcard. Several of Engel's studies however transmit something more than the simple, documented 'fact' of the highway. Like Stewart, he treats it as a natural feature of the desert. To experience one without the other is meaningless.

One of Engel's preferred approaches was to photograph from the roadside so the highway emerged at the lower left or right foreground at a diagonal. This point of view was not original but unlike another, which was to stand in the centre of the road, it not only maintained the sense of distance and space, it more clearly implied the highway came from somewhere outside of the frame.

In "Hiway 50 Fallon to Austin" (fig 44), the bare tree in the middle ground provides a balance and adds perspective to the road, but it also leads the eye in to a another detail. To the left of the road is a small settlement, a ranch or possibly an old Spanish mission, that would be out of the frame or obscured by the horizon if the photograph was taken from the centre of the highway. The

¹⁴ For examples, see Lange in the Phaidon 55 volume, *Dorothea Lange* (no page number) Frank's *U.S 285 New Mexico* in *The Americans* (no page number), Shore's *I-8 Yuma New Mexico, September 23 1974* in *Uncommon Places* 2004, p103, Adams' *Nebraska State Highway 2, Box Butte Country, Nebraska* in *From the Missouri West*, 1980.

photograph is more than a study of the landscape. In 1986 *Life* anointed the route between Ely and Fernley, where this was taken, the “loneliest road in America”: “It’s totally empty,” the magazine quoted an American Automobiles Association spokesperson. “There are no points of interest” (Anon, 2012, np) Tourism promoters would seize on the claim and turn it to their advantage, quoting from the article in tourist brochures as though it were a boast, but when Engel took this photograph the stretch was even more desolate and short on services. The image is also about space and an emptiness that was already emblematic of Nevada.

The resistance to interpretation that Batchen identified has as much to do with the medium of postcards as with the images they contain. On one hand, aware that the photographer is aiming for a mass-market, we hesitate to read too much into them. They are ‘anti-intellectual’ in so far as they dissuade us from deeper analysis. That said; the mass-market is nebulous and for a photographer to determine what it will accept involves a process of interpretation we can consider intellectual. Another detail in the scene may cast light on Engel’s thinking. In the right foreground are tyre tracks that appear to be fresh. Given his frequent circumnavigations of the state, he would have been aware of this stretch of road with the tree and the settlement before he came to it. If the tracks belonged to his car, it appears that he pulled over to take the shot then reversed to improve the composition, meaning there is more deliberation behind it than we generally credit postcard photographers with. We know he did care: though the description ‘authorless’ suggests a generic, even thoughtless regard for

content, it does not exclude an awareness of the power of images to transmit subjective ideas.

Chapter 4: Engel in the Documentary Tradition

The rediscovery in recent years of the work of previously obscure photographers such as Fred Herzog, Mike Disfarmer and Vivian Maier has expanded our definition of documentary photography. Though Disfarmer was a studio portraitist and Maier and Herzog photographed as amateurs, the corpora the three produced are regarded as documentary by nature of the extensive records they created. If we want to consider Engel's work as documentary, we must begin with the premise that regardless of subject matter or theme, the documentary photographer is a social observer. The case has been made that we can read implicit social commentary into the NPS photographs. The question is whether the medium of postcards refutes that.

As a producer of postcard images, Engel worked on the principle that his photographs were ephemeral and disposable. Once he put them out for sale, they no longer belonged to him. Customers could collect them and put them in albums if they wanted, but they could also deface the image with messages or post them off to friends, who months later might throw them in the bin. This did not matter because the image could be reproduced as often as demand required. Some years after his father's death, Burton Frasher Jr. was reprinting images from the catalogue that had been taken years earlier (Holt, 78).

If Engel did not care about the legacy of his photographs, why should we? Part of the answer to that lies in the statement he made in the 1941 interview with the *Nevada State Journal*. If his principal motive for making three trips a

year around the state was to “keep them up to date”, he was in effect documenting the physical changes to the landscape.

One postcard in the author’s collection (fig 28) and two un-catalogued postcards at the Humboldt Museum show Bridge St in Winnemucca taken from similar vantage points, looking down the street with the Hotel Humboldt in the right foreground and the Sonoma Range in the background. Examining the hoarding on the American Theatre halfway down the street in the author’s postcard, we can see that the film advertised is *In Old Chicago* (released in April 1938). On the Humboldt Museum postcards, the American has become the Sage Theatre and the first shows *Fast and Loose* (released February 17, 1939) while the second has *Drums Along the Mohawk* (November 10, 1939).¹⁵ The difference may appear slight, little else in the streetscape changes, but for Engel the renaming of the theatre made the first postcard redundant. For historians these are tangible records of the town’s development.

The streetscape of Winnemucca has changed dramatically. The Hotel Humboldt and most of the other buildings in these views have been demolished. The shell of the Sonoma Inn remains but it is now Winners’ Casino.

This is also true of much of the constructed landscape that Engel photographed throughout Nevada. Along the highways the Valmy diner, the Highway fountain at Wells and the gas station at Painted Rock have disappeared. In 1983 geographers Thomas and Geraldine Vale retraced George R. Stewart’s journey and, in a similar project to Klett’s Second View, re-photographed the

¹⁵ Dates of the film releases were taken from the IMDB webpages, accessed February 12, 2014. *In Old Chicago*; http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029047/?ref_=nv_sr_1. *Fast and Loose*; http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031299/?ref_=fn_al_tt_2 *Drums Along the Mohawk*; http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031252/?ref_=nv_sr_1

highway from the same vantage points. In Nevada the surface had been improved and U.S 40 was now a dual lane carriageway, rerouted in sections with the original road now overgrown with scrub (147-161).

The most dramatic changes can be measured from the postcards of North Virginia Street in Reno. The NPS studio at 225 Sierra St was just a short walk through an alley to the electric Reno sign above the entrance to North Virginia Street. Over the years Engel would take dozens of photographs of the streetscape from both ends and at all times of day and night. While his intention was to produce postcards for sale, these nevertheless record the historical trace.

In 1931 legislation legalizing gambling in Nevada was passed. Its effect upon North Virginia Street would be profound. An early view of the street shows the signage for a couple of clubs but mostly it belongs to commercial retail: we see signs for furniture and drugstores, one advertising pianos and a couple of stationers (fig 13). The date this was taken is not certain but within a few years there was an explosion of casinos and nightclubs along the strip (fig 14).

Nevada's unique status as the only state to have legalized gambling remained until Atlantic City in New Jersey allowed it in 1976. In 1931 laws were also passed permitting relatively quick divorces, where one of the parties only had to be resident in the state for six weeks. Like the legalizing of prizefighting earlier in the century, these laws were intended to attract visitors to a state that had a dramatically fluctuating population and had been too heavily dependent upon mining.

Their success was apparently mixed; people came but seldom stayed yet until Las Vegas was developed in the 1950s, Reno was the largest and most visited city

in the state with a reputation for permissiveness that invoked frontier days (Hulse, 196-7 and 264-5). This was reflected in an aesthetic built around neon signage that Venturi, Brown and Izenour would seize upon in their 1972 study, *Learning from Las Vegas*. Behind its crowded façade was a considered style that responded to popular culture and rejected highbrow theories on architecture as a monumental expression of function.





Fig 13 and 14: Two NPS postcards showing the effect gambling laws had on the Reno streetscape. The first was taken some time in the 1930s about midway down North Virginia Street with the electric Reno sign behind the photographer. There are more stationery stores than clubs. The second, taken in the 1940s, from about the same position but facing the other way, indicates how casinos and clubs had taken over the strip.
(Author's collection)

Ironically, no sooner had *Learning from Las Vegas* been published than plans for the redevelopment of Las Vegas and Reno were proposed. Both cities would soon be dominated by hotel complexes built according to the generic and overwhelming approach that Venturi, Brown and Izenour protested against. Taking one of Engel's later scenes as a guide (fig 14), nothing recognizable in the view remains today; even the famous electric sign has been replaced and moved a few blocks around the corner. He had photographed Virginia Street so assiduously however that collectively his images can be considered a record of the development of a vernacular approach that became an expression of a distinct Nevadan culture.

Had Herz not procured the stock from the NPS then donated it to the University of Reno archives, that record would now be dispersed, with eBay being the most publicly viable repository for the work. That the photographs are now part of a stable archive enhances the possibility of regarding the accumulation of Engel's work as documentary in effect if not in purpose. This situation however opens up a subtler problem, especially when we try to impose our own narrative upon the images.

Hayden White is just one scholar who has pointed out that by dint of being constructed, incomplete, and open to public interpretation, the archive has narratives foisted on it (1980, 9-11). We know that the creation of the collection in the UNR archives began with two critical decisions: what would be offered to Herz and what he would take. If Engel was correct in his estimation that he had taken over 8000 postcard photographs by 1941, those from the Herz collection now in UNR Special Collections, including original negatives and proof sheets, represent only a fraction. On top of that, the absence of studio portraits cannot be taken as evidence they were not made since we cannot be certain that Herz did not turn them down. Relying upon the archive then, the most complete resource for his work, still involves making assumptions, especially about the gaps. What we have is sufficient to build an argument that Engel viewed the highway in a certain way, but it is made with the awareness that alternative evidence may have existed at some point.

Having acknowledged the problems in classifying Engel as a documentary photographer; his contemporaneity and a shared interest in the vernacular may invoke the work of the Farm Security Administration, The best known

documentary project of the pre-war era, it was headed by Roy Stryker and included the photographers Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Russell Lee. It would be more accurate however to associate Engel's work with another project Roy Stryker was in charge of after he left the FSA.

Established in 1943, the Standard Oil (New Jersey) Photographic Project was an attempt to restore the corporation's reputation after it was investigated for some of its trading practices with Germany (Plattner, 12). Stryker would take a similarly expansive approach to that he employed with the FSA. Rather than simply producing advertising material, the project would be a sweeping depiction of the influence of oil on American life, which by this point permeated every facet from refineries and steelyards to the schoolhouses (Keller, 1986). Despite the breadth of subject matter, the car and the highway were inevitably central to the project, being two of the most elemental symbols of the relationship between oil and popular culture. To the photographers on the project, cars and highways did not just represent transport but keys to social mobility and economic prosperity. By association, the highway infrastructure of gas stations, roadhouses and diners featured prominently.

Although the imagery of the Standard Oil photographers and Engel shared an occasional resemblance, their strongest parallels lay within their view of the highway as a positive force. Negative associations with car travel, such as accident fatalities and the developing awareness of pollution, received little attention from the Standard Oil photographers and, not surprisingly, none from Engel. A collection of his postcards can be read as a narrative of successive

journeys around Nevada but also as a typology of evidence of the improvements brought to the state with the development of the highway networks¹⁶.

In 1963, a decade after Engel drowned, Ed Ruscha published *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, a book depicting gas stations along Route 66 between Los Angeles and Oklahoma City. Writing about it in *A Century of Artists' Books*, Johanna Drucker described its radical innovation as being, "informed by minimalist notions of repetitive sequence and seriality (that) read against the photographic landscape of highly aesthetized image-making" (76). Visually, Ruscha's images were little different from Engel's postcards of gas stations and anyone familiar with those could be forgiven for wondering where that innovation lay. The answer resides in Ruscha and Engel's disparate intentions. As cheap as the quality was, Ruscha presented his book as a work of art. Although gas stations were the ostensible subject matter, the book also traced his journey backwards from where he now lived to where he had been born. A more traditional approach would have been to document the changing landscape and its identifiable features, but: "My pictures are not that interesting, nor the subject matter," Ruscha would explain in an interview with *Artforum* in 1965. "They are simply a collection of 'facts'" (Ruscha, 2002, 24). Though he suggests the images and the idea behind the book were throwaways, and he may not have appreciated at the time what impact it would have, this was said in a knowing tone. The irony was that in presenting his work as no more important than a casual afterthought, Ruscha was attempting to place himself within the same marginal territory within the history of photography that a postcard

¹⁶ For a discussion on the different approaches between narrative and typology in landscape documentary photography, see Liz Wells, *Land Matters*, chapter 3, *After the Frontier, Environment and the West*, 2011, pp107-161

photographer such as Engel did. Elsewhere Drucker described the seminal, if misunderstood, influence *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* has had on the idea of the artist's book (11).

In his introduction to the original *New Topographics* exhibition in 1975, William Jenkins stated that the unifying principle behind each photographer's work was an absence of style (5). He quoted one exhibitor, Lewis Baltz, declaring that "the ideal photographic document would appear to be without author or art" (6). As the curator, Jenkins' inspiration was Ruscha, specifically *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. To Jenkins, the images in the book "were stripped of any artistic frills and reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion and opinion" (5).

We need to recall Evans's "simplicity, directness, clarity ... without artistic pretentiousness", because despite Jenkins' enthusiasm for Ruscha, most of the *New Topographics* photographers considered Evans the important figure (Salvesen, 2010. 14-18). Ruscha would also cite him as an influence (2002, 126). The discrepancy is understandable. For photographers working in the documentary approach, Evans was a pre-eminent figure. To Jenkins the curator, Ruscha the contemporary artist was equally resonant.

In one important way Jenkins's admiration for Ruscha becomes pertinent to reading Engel's photographs. If Ruscha made his choice of gas stations as subject sound perfunctory in his interviews, they were also deliberately truistic signposts along his journey back to his birthplace. The gas station had become so emblematic of the highway that anyone looking at the book would have

understood the context of a journey without needing to know its route or purpose. In considering them so commonplace, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* stands midway in the shift in meaning from Engel's regard for the highway and its infrastructure as symbols of progress to the *New Topographics* view of them as evidence of the spiritual emptiness of the heartland,

Existing outside usual criteria for reading images: "beauty, emotion and opinion", the 'authorless' photograph either eluded interpretation – it was what it was and no more – or conversely it made itself open to a variety of interpretations. By treating the subjects in their images as 'a collection of facts', to paraphrase Ruscha, the *New Topographics* photographers compelled viewers to draw their own conclusions. In the introduction to the catalogue for the restored *New Topographics* exhibition in 2009, Britt Salvesen described the minor impact the original exhibition had and how many visitors found the images boring (11). Those banal depictions of the landscape in Robert Adams and Baltz' work especially, would nevertheless come to be read for the often subtle yet pernicious effect of the human presence (Foster-Rice, Rohrbach, 2013, xvii). That studiously detached but critical point of view that the photographers in *New Topographics* took would come to define landscape photography. For later exhibitions such as *The Altered Landscape*, held at the Nevada Museum of Art in 2011, the 1975 exhibition was a touchstone (See Wolff's introduction).

Writing in the catalogue to the 1999 Nevada Museum of Art collection, also called *The Altered Landscape*, Thomas W. Southall listed some of the evidence prevalent in contemporary landscape photography: "sterile new homes in stark, unvegetated terrain, a sickly saguaro cactus riddled with bullet holes,

bombing ranges ... and numerous examples of mines, dams and concrete that ... seem dramatically incongruous in their remote, unpopulated surroundings" (33).

The idea that the photographed landscape is meaningless or deceptive without these signs of human presence has become entrenched since the 1975 *New Topographics* exhibition. Southall's adjectives give the *raison d'être*: the landscape is most honestly represented by the damage we have enacted upon it. For a contemporary photographer, the initials carved into the side of Battle Mountain would most likely be interpreted as either defilement or an ironic statement on the subjugation of the landscape. For Engel however they were a signpost; an advertisement to travellers telling them where they were. It is a statement made not in opposition to contemporary arguments but outside of them.

Typically, the genealogy of contemporary landscape photography works back from *New Topographics*, through the explicit ecological concerns of Eliot Porter, to the abstractions of Minor White and Paul Caponigro and the modernist interpretations of Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, to arrive at the beginning: the survey photographers of the mid-Nineteenth century¹⁷. It is a narrative that makes sense, with the transitions clearly defined. Postcard photographers such as Engel are excluded, but what contemporary photographers are reacting against has less to do with the romantic fictions of Ansel Adams than it does with the trace left in the development of the land by the marks of progress. Beginning

¹⁷ See for example Szarkowski, *American Landscapes: Photographs from the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, 1981 and compare with the 1963 MOMA catalogue, also by Szarkowski, *The Photographer and the American Landscape*. The earlier book follows a chronological sequence. Likewise, the catalogue to the German exhibition *Amerikanische Landschaftsfotographie 1860-1978*, traces the evolution of landscape photography in a chronology beginning with George Barnard and Carleton Watkins and ending with Frank Gohlke. (Medinger, Trapp, 1978, *passim*).

in the 1920s, Engel recorded the physical transformation from 'old west' to modern state. Fifty years later, *New Topographics* began the process of recognizing some of the effects wrought by modernization, from the blandness of desert housing estates to industrial pollution. To overlook the work of Engel and other postcard photographers is to miss a more credible and politically complicated narrative than that provided by the aesthetic developments in landscape photography. If arguments that he invested his work with social comment would be unconvincing, he nevertheless represents ideas that permeated American consciousness and national identity in the first half of the twentieth century and became points of contention and resistance in the second half. Ephemeral as his work is, it is an unacknowledged source for understanding what came after in photography.

Chapter 5: From Reno to Wendover

The images in this section are arranged in a linear sequence moving long the Victory Highway from Reno to Wendover, with a couple of detours to Pyramid Lake and the road to Pioche. As indicated in the text, there is no suggestion that Engel set out to create a documentary sequence of the highway. Nevertheless, the enormous number of photographs he took amounts to a visual history of the highway and Nevada from the 1930s through to the early 1950s. Furthermore, his photographs show a consistency in theme and approach that depict not just the history but demonstrate abiding ideas. Not the least of these are the virtues of development that the highways brought to Nevada. The case has been argued that, whether or not we are opposed to them, Engel's underlying beliefs are more relevant to contemporary landscape photography than the traditional history of the genre allows. By laying out his postcards in a sequence this way, we can see how concepts important to contemporary landscape photographers, not the least the ways development has altered the land, were regarded from a similar point of view but with entirely different intentions.

All postcards in this section are from the author's collection.



Fig 15: *Harolds Club Reno Nevada, C1949.*

The mural created for Harold's Club by artists Theodore McFall and Sargent Claude Johnson in 1949, shows a group of settlers clearing the land while surrounded by their wagon train. Native Americans watch passively from the mountains. The inscription across the top reads: "Dedicated in all humility to those who blazed the trail".



Fig 16: *Pyramid Lake Nev*, C1930s-40s.

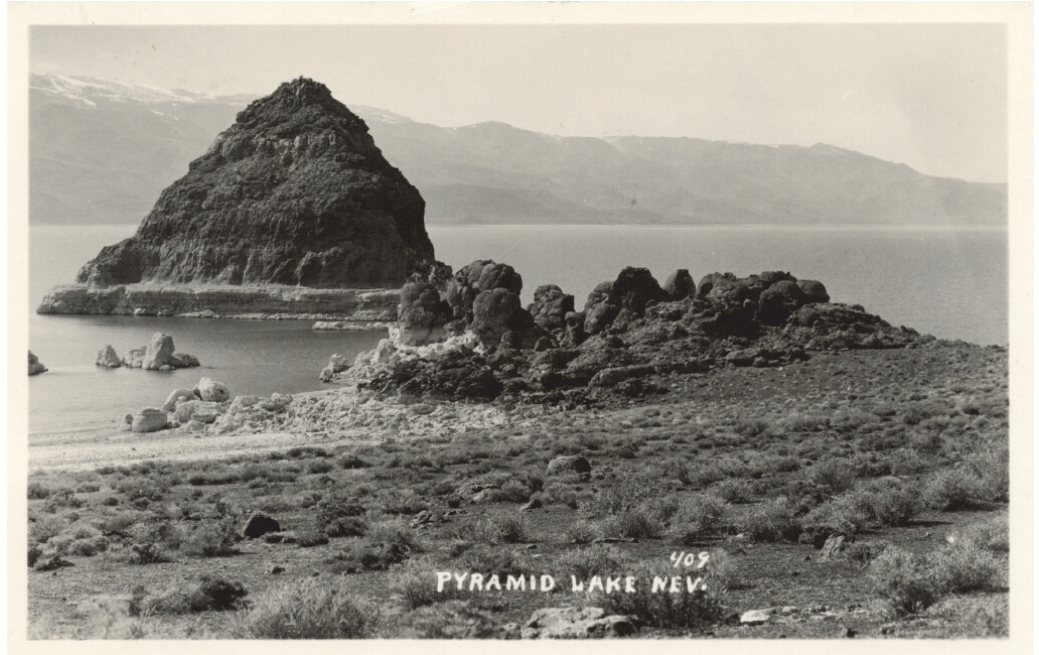


Fig 17: *Pyramid Lake Nev*, C1930s-40s.



Fig 18: *Scene on US 40 Reno to Salt Lake City*: C1940s.
Sequentially, this scene may belong further east, around the Ruby Mountains.



Fig 19: *Lovelock Nev.* C1940s.
Note the courthouse at the end of the street. Now the Pershing County Library, it is a typical example of Colonial Revival architecture.



Fig 20: "Post Office" Lovelock Nev. C1930s-40s.

A typical example of WPA Moderne. In the previous image, the flagpole can be seen to the right of the courthouse.



Fig 21: *MT Scene U,S 40 Lovelock to Winnemucca*. C1930s-40s.

Had Engel wanted a view of the mountains without the telegraph poles, it wouldn't have taken much to walk out to a point past them. This image suggests he may have consciously photographed from as close to a driver or passenger's perspective as possible.

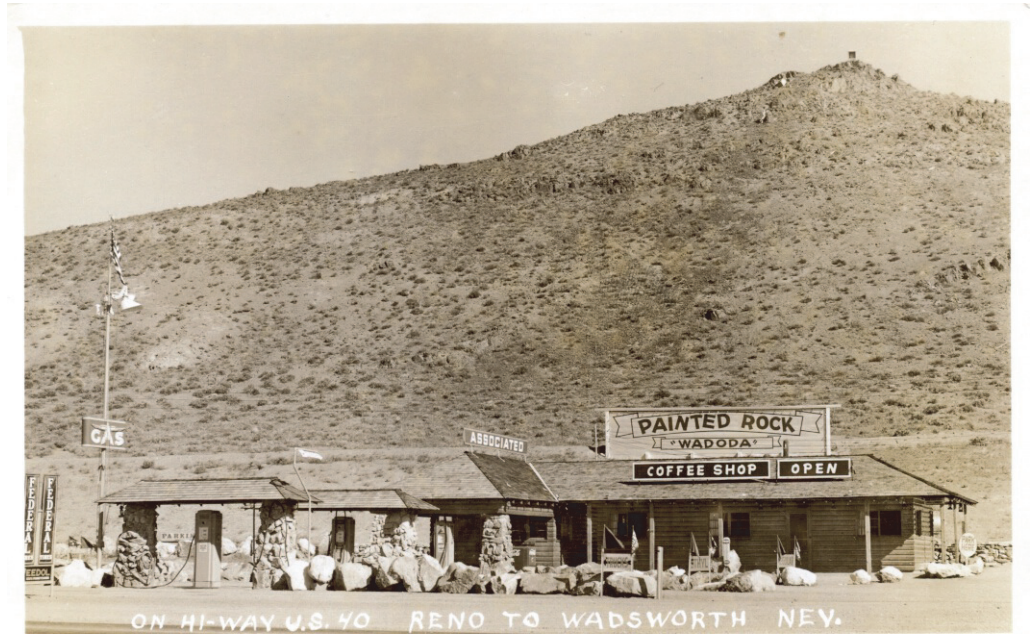


Fig 22: On Hiway U.S 40 Reno to Wadsworth Nev. C1930s-40s.



Fig 23: "Rye Patch Dam" near Lovelock, Nev. C1940s.
Built between 1935 and 1936, the Rye Patch dam was another WPA project.

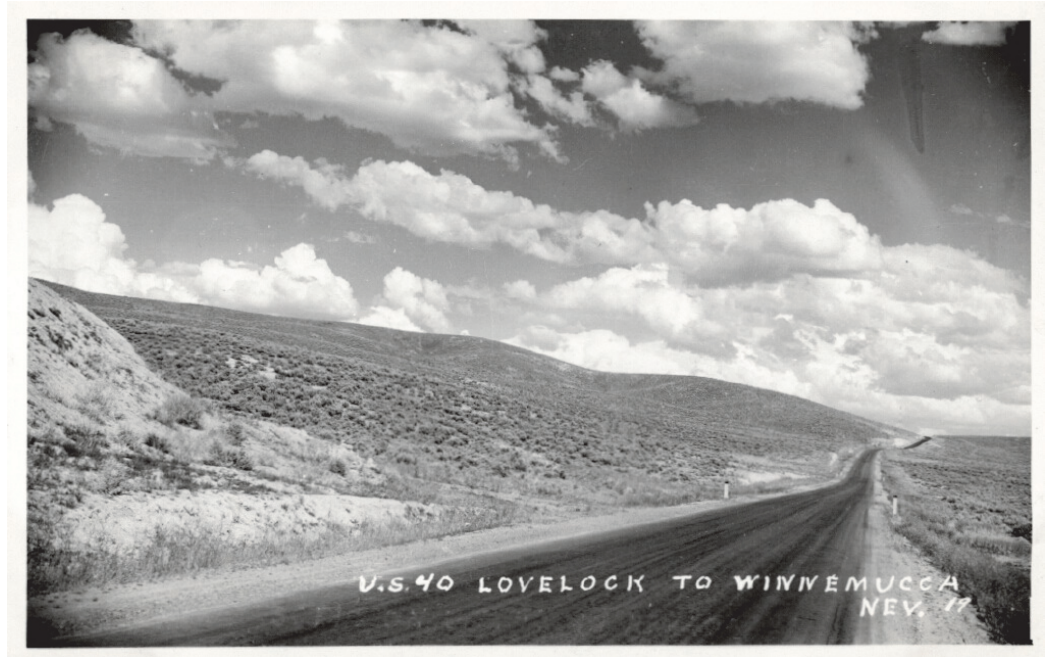


Fig 24: *U.S 40 Lovelock to Winnemucca Nev. C1940s.*



Fig 25: "Star Peak" U.S 40 Winnemucca to Lovelock Nev. C1940s.
The billboard to the left, for the "Two Stiffs" gas station, indicates Lovelock is 45 miles away.

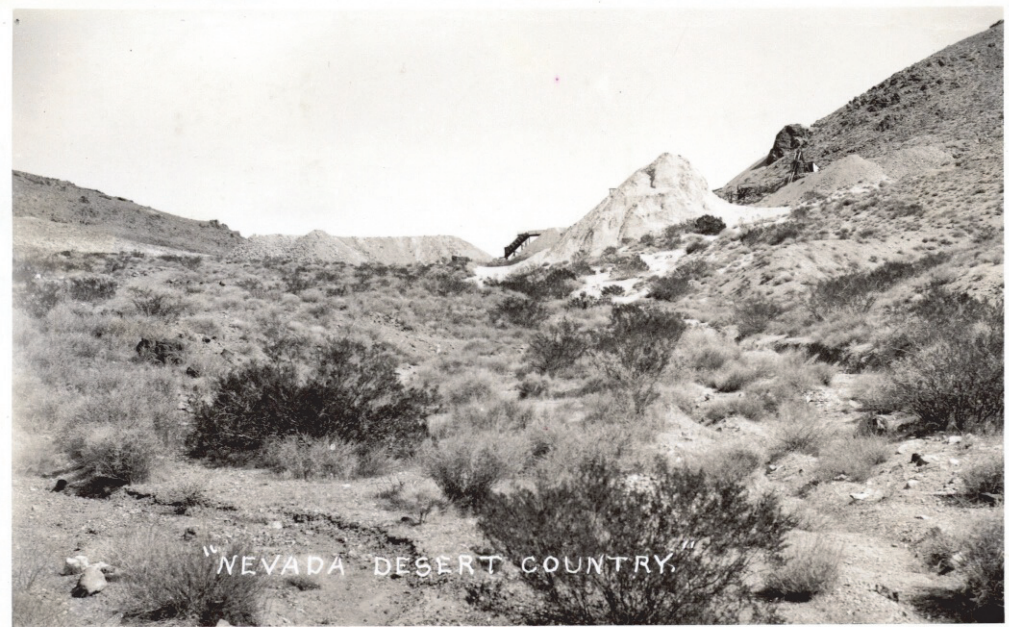


Fig 26: *"Nevada Desert Country"*, C1930s-40s.
Note the structure behind the outcrop.



Fig 27: *Winnemucca Nev. C1947.*
A typical example of Streamline Moderne.



Fig 28: Winnemucca Nev. 1938

The American Theatre is halfway down the street on the right side. The film advertised on the hoarding just behind the awning is *In Old Chicago*.

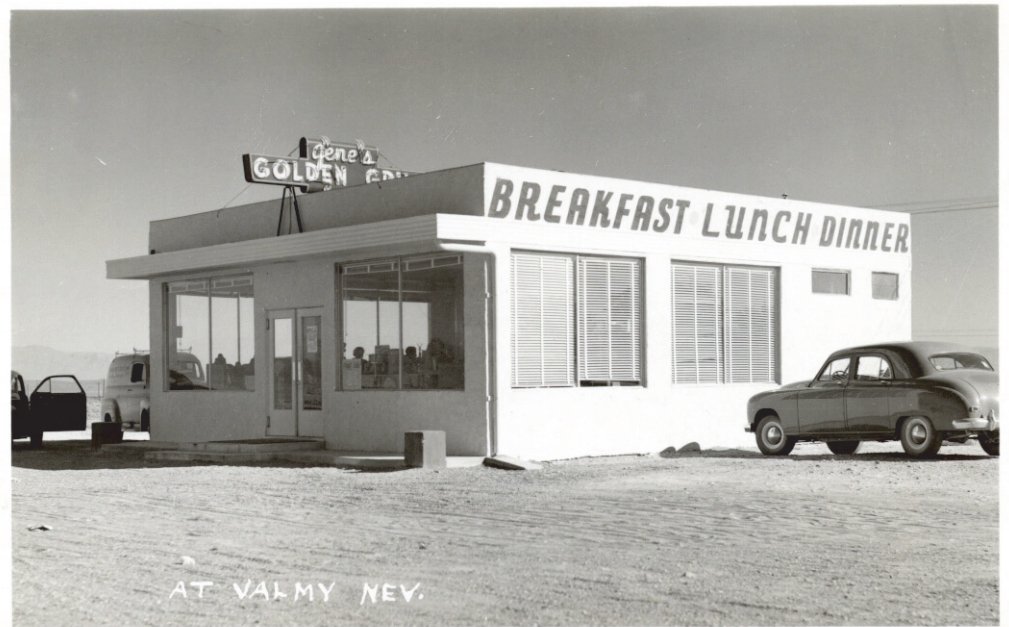


Fig 29: *At Valmy Nev.* C1940s.

The open door on the car to the left adds balance to the composition and a sense of activity. The way Engel framed this shot looks as though including the open door but not the car itself was intentional.



Fig 30: *Battle Mountain Nev. C1930s.*
Judging by the cars, this was taken in the early 1930s.



Fig 31: *Battle Mountain Nev.* C1930s.

The engraved initials on the hillside are obviously intended to be the focus of the image though the scene is framed with the sky dominating.



Fig 32: *S.P Depot – Carlin, Nevada. C1930s-40s.*
Southern Pacific Railroad had a history that could be traced back to the construction of the trans-continental railway in the 1860s.



Fig 33: *U.S 40 Elko to Carlin Nev. C1930s-40s.*



Fig 34: Greyhound Bus Depot Elko Nev. C1930s-40s.



Fig 35: *Night at Elko, Nev.* C1930s-40s.



Fig 36: *Clouds over the Ruby Mountains Nev. C1930-40s.*



Fig 37: *Ruby Mts from Wells Nev.* C1930s-40s.
Note the solitary figure in the centre of the image.



Fig 38: *Highway near Wells Nev. C1930s-40s.*



Fig 39: *Entering Wells Nev.* C1930s-40s.

In this scene Engel must have stood on a low rise to capture the panorama of the town. The image looks effortless though it contains a wealth of detail.



Fig 40: *Highway Fountain - Wells, Nevada, C1930s-40s.*
Compare this image to those Ed Ruscha took for *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* around twenty years later.



Fig 41: *Wells to Ely Highway Nevada*. C1930s-40s.

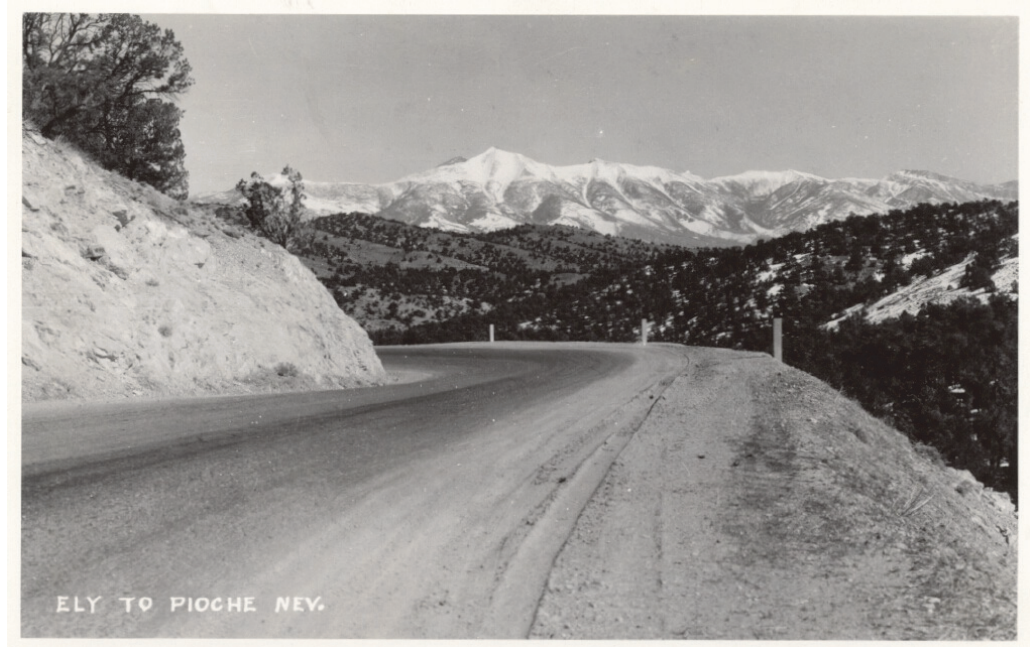


Fig 42: *Ely to Pioche Nev.* C1930s-40s.

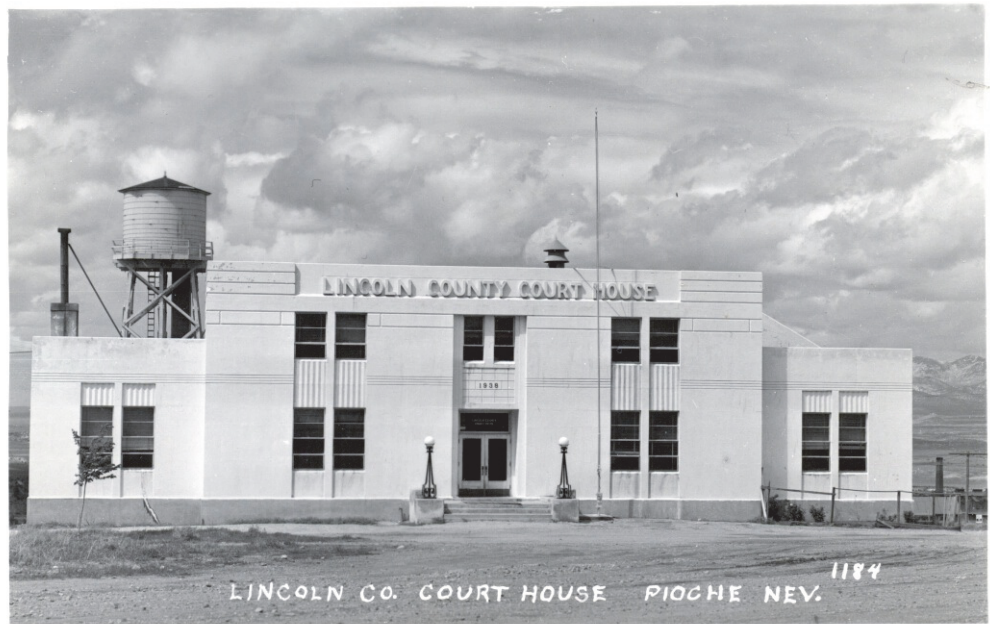


Fig 43: *Lincoln Co. Court House Pioche Nev. C1938-1940s.*



Fig 44: *Hiway 50 Fallon to Austin. C1930s-40s.*

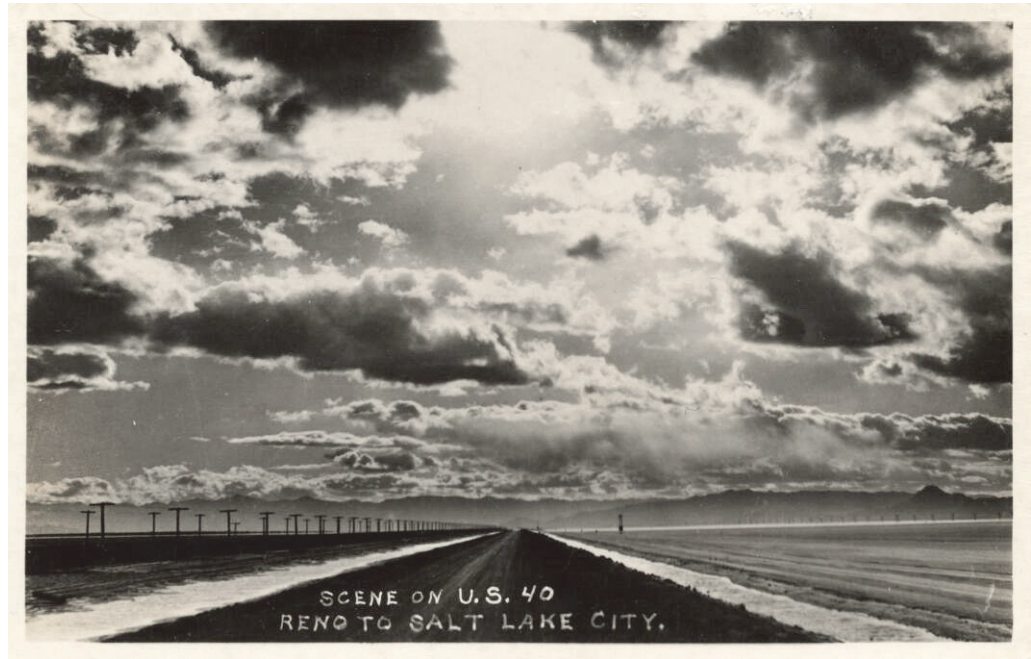


Fig 45: *Scene on U.S 40 Reno to salt Lake City.* C1930s-40s.
Compare this scene to those of highways disappearing into vanishing points by
photographers such as Lange, Evans and Frank.



Fig 46: "State Line Service" Nev-Utah State Line. C1930s-40s.



Fig 47: "Wendover Drug" Wendover Utah. C1930s-40s.
Had any of the *New Topographics* photographers cited Engel as an influence, this might have been a key image, displaying the functional ordinariness of the built environment in the desert.



Fig 48: Nev.-Utah Stateline. C1952.

A colour transparency of a near identical image (a car has parked under the café sign at the hotel) is held at UNR Special Collections; <http://contentdm.library.unr.edu/u?/spphotos,4489> . It suggests this may come from a colour transparency or, more likely, that Engel carried several types of film. Neon cowboy Wendover Will was constructed in 1952. Given that Engel drowned a year later, this was taken shortly after Wendover Will went up and the colour transparency may have been used as an official or privately paid commission.



Fig 49: *Salt Flats Wendover to Salt Lake City*, C1940s-50s.

An image reminiscent of the opening scenes to the 1955 film *Bad Day at Black Rock* and a reminder of something only touched on in this work; the relationship between cinema and postcard photography in the immediate post-war era. How conscious this was is difficult to determine. This scene is also carefully composed. Note the balance that the brick (?) in the middle of the lake adds to the relationship between the train and the car.

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